



Tom Barrett
Mayor, City of Milwaukee

November 18, 2008

Kevin Kennedy
Director and General Counsel
Government Accountability Board
17 West Main Street, Suite 310
Madison, WI 53701-2973

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Nearly 275,000 citizens, or just over 80% of Milwaukee's registered voters, participated in the November 4 election. The City of Milwaukee, like many municipalities across the state, experienced an unprecedented number of individuals voting absentee in-person or by mail (nearly 45,000 compared to just under 19,000 in 2004). This increase demonstrates that Wisconsin residents support early voting opportunities that alleviate long lines on Election Day and ensure the ability to cast a ballot in the election.

While in-person absentee voting in Milwaukee was successful and highly commended by the public, the process itself proved to be costly and inefficient. Additionally, while voters appreciated the opportunity to vote in advance of the election, many were disappointed – and even concerned – that their ballots were not inserted directly into a voting machine.

The Election Day processing of these ballots was exceptionally cumbersome and would have been unmanageable had Milwaukee not changed to a system of central processing in February.

It is for these reasons that I encourage the Government Accountability Board to advocate with the legislature for the adoption of early voting in the State of Wisconsin.

Since 2004, the City has invested significantly in assessing and improving our election systems, from increasing the budget and dedicated staff for the Election Commission to providing greater access to citywide resources, including the support of hundreds of city employees for every election.

While I am proud of the city's performance in this election, it is essential that we all look toward future elections with an eye toward further improvements. Actual early voting is a clear next step for Wisconsin.

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Reports from states currently offering early voting demonstrate that the process is more cost effective, efficient and increases accessibility to voting. As with all of the recent changes that have occurred to election law, the state should examine and employ a model of the best practices utilized by other states. Our own research into early voting trends indicates that Wisconsin municipalities should offer the following:

- Multiple early voting locations such as libraries, community centers, etc.
- An extended (three weeks or more) window for early voting
- Early voting sites in cities with sizeable populations (e.g. 75,000 or more) that remain open at least eight hours per weekday and at least eight hours in the aggregate per weekend

As Mayor, I remain dedicated to clean and fair elections in the City of Milwaukee. I am hopeful that the Government Accountability Board will pursue early voting in order to provide Milwaukee – and other municipalities – with the tools necessary to administer strong elections.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Barrett". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tom" and last name "Barrett" clearly distinguishable.

Tom Barrett
Mayor

Cc: Governor Jim Doyle
Milwaukee State Legislative Delegation
Senate Majority Leader Russell Decker
Assembly Speaker-elect Michael Sheridan